

## ***Call from the roots: Time for contemporary Tribal Theatre Movement***

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*“The people of the tribal areas and the hills attract me greatly and deserve our very special care. I am anxious that they should advance, but even I am more anxious that they shouldn’t lose their artistry and joy in life and the culture that distinguish them in many ways.” - Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru.*

*“Drama is not a flat mirror of life, giving a faithful but colorless image of reality. It is a focusing mirror, which condenses the colored rays and transforms a gleam into a light and a light into a flame.” - Victor Hugo*

### **INTRODUCTION**

“Call from the roots” was the caption of the article published in “The Arts” National page of Sunday Express of Indian Express on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2002. The article was based on an exclusive interview with this researcher-author done by Kasturi Roy, the then sub-editor of Indian Express. The caption of that article is kept as the caption of this article and the title of the book which the present researcher-author has prepared for publication as early as it can be possible. The book is based on the Doctoral Thesis of this researcher-author. Pioneer research and experimental project was undertaken during 2000-2007 on the novel conception/scheme titled “Developing Contemporary Tribal Theatre (in dialects) in Orissa” for Ph.D. in Music (Drama) under the auspices of Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar. Historically, this pioneer researcher is the first Doctorate in the field of Theatre in Odisha in Academic Educational level in 2007. The synopsis of the thesis is presented here to remind “The call from the roots”. The various data of the then period might have been changed, but the essence of the subject remaining same as a whole. Hopefully, this report will be helpful to the students, teachers, researchers, theatre practitioners, aficionados and connoisseurs of theatre. This visionary researcher-director had proved the conception successful during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It’s time for Contemporary Tribal theatre Movement – organize Tribal theatre training workshops and Grand Festivals at the State, National and International level. The zone is yet

unexplored and fertile to get unique fragrant flowers to be bloomed in the field of developing contemporary tribal theatre.

This research project for Ph.D. in Music (Drama) under the auspices of Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar, Odisha became possible on the part of this researcher due to the award of a Junior fellowship in Theatre by the Department of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi for the year 2000-2002. The experimental pilot project based on the very hypothesis was organized successfully at the State level in Bhubaneswar in the year 2002 by “Interface” (A Media Centre for Socio-Cultural Development, Bhubaneswar) in association with the Academy of Tribal Dialects and Culture (ATDC), ST & SC Development Department, Government of Odisha and the project was also supported by UNICEF, Bhubaneswar. Besides, further experiments had been carried out by the researcher successfully in the tribal dominated North-East States of India viz. Nagaland (2002) and Tripura (2005). It was proved that the conception was sustainable beyond the pilot project. The news / interviews / reviews in electronics media and print media both at the State & National level as well as the views of the experts of both State and National level testified to the practical success and socio-cultural value of the very contemporary conception / scheme.

The conception / scheme was suffused with novelty. The very title of the topic of this research project made it clear that it was not a general theoretical macro-study of Dramatics or constituting an exhaustive study and criticism of any published work of others. Rather, it was an innovative, application-oriented, creative-experimental research project on the very hypothetical multidimensional novel conception / scheme developed by the researcher himself which incidentally happened to be the pioneering venture in the history / trend of theatre in Odisha that aimed at exploring a very special dimension of theatre movement i.e. contemporary Tribal theatre. It reflected socio-cultural concern as well as academic value being an historic initiative at the micro level signifying the broader movement to fulfill the National task. It was an analytical research work on tribal society and culture of Odisha as well as application of new creative research techniques to the contemporary issue of a specific area related to revival, preservation

and promotion of the indigenous tribal languages/dialects, art and culture that faced the threat of extinction alarmingly amidst the torrential current of Globalization, Urbanization and Modernization vis-a-vis developing and introducing the “Contemporary Tribal theatre” of the communities. And thus, the subject was interdisciplinary in nature. Though the project was conceived in the context of the tribes of Odisha, yet the vision carried far reaching implications for the aboriginal tribal communities of the nation and the world in general as the tribes are found all over the world.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE & FIELD STUDY**

### ***Overview of Tribal Society and Culture of Odisha***

Odisha occupied an unique position in the ethnographic map of India for having the largest configurations of tribal communities numbering 62 i.e. Bhagat, Baiga, Banjara, Bathudi, Bhattada, Bhuyan, Bhumia, Bhumij, Bhunjia, Binjhal, Binjhia, Birhor, BondoPoraja, Chenchu, Dal, DesuaBhumij, Dharua, Didayi, Gadaba, Gandia, Ghara, Gond, Ho, Holva, Jatapu, Juanga, KandhaGauda, Kawar, Kharia, Kharwar, Kondh, Kisan, Kol Laharas, Kollohara, Kolha, KoliMalhar, Kandha Dora, Kora, Korua, Kutia, Koya, Kulis, Lodha, Madia, Mahali, Mankidi, Mankirdia, Matya, Mirdhas, Munda, Mundari, Omanatya, Oraon, Parenga, Paroja, Pentia, Rajuar, Santal, Saora, ShabarLodha, Saunti&Tharua. The 62 tribal communities were widely different from one another in terms of their ethnographic details. They had among them one of the largest all India group like the Santals though Kondhs were the most numerous in the State. Bondas and Dongrias were the most colourful among the Indian tribes. The 12 most primitive tribes typical to Odisha were Junag, Bonda, Didayi, Lanjiasaora, KutiaKondh, Dangoriakondh, Birhor, Mankidia, PaudiBhuyan, Hill Kharia, Lodha and Saora. Among them Bonda, KutiaKondh and Juang were the most primitive in the whole country. Santals were the most acculturated and Juang, Bonda were still very little touched by the impact of modernization. Santali language was included in the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian constitution in 2004 and the language is written in Ol Chiki script developed by late Pundit Raghunath Murmu of the community.

These tribal societies were valuable segments of our National heritage. It was said that Odisha could be proud of her wealth in the form of tribal communities which constituted a vital segment of the cultural heterogeneity of India. The tribal people of Odisha who constituted one fifth of the total population had contributed enormously to the growth of rich cultural heritage of the State. Tribal expressed their ethno-cultural identity and distinctiveness in their social organization, languages, rituals, festivals and also in their dress, ornamentation, art and craft. The amazing conglomeration of traditions, beliefs, philosophies that together constituted and vitalized the rituals and festivals of the tribes, had descended from antiquity. Every facet of their life covering round-the-year activities was intimately connected with religious beliefs and ritual practices and each occasion demanded song and dance performances appropriate to it. It was these aspects of their culture that rendered meaning and depth to their lives within their social structure.

But with the passage of time, the inevitable process of change in the tribal sector had set in. The changing scenario showed a conspicuous difference between the tribal today and the tribal yesterday. The modern processes by and large had put up before the tribal, the Western-Urban-Industrial-Democratic model for inducing transformation. With the operation of these factors of change, the culture of the tribal was in a flux. With the spread of education and impact of ideas from outside world, there was a remarkable change in their outlook that had reshaped their world view. Because of the influence of the changing times, the old socio-religious concept was receiving a new dimension taking into consideration, the present need and dynamics of the situation. However, the tribal neither were capable of restricting it, nor could they fully assimilate it. They were caught in a dilemma which was unprecedented to their way of life. A conspicuous change was noticed in the life of the tribal during the British rule, wherein Christianity penetrated. Change in religious faith led to corresponding change in festivals and village organization. Such transformation indicated the process of compromise, combination and elimination and conflict among two types of traditions, indigenous and borrowed. Borrowed Christianity developed and flourished, was successful in introducing modernized style of life with regards to certain sections of tribal pockets breaking their cultural homogeneity.

In the empirical blue print for the development of tribal of the Nation, care had been taken to allow them to develop their cultural dynamism, on the other hand, possible facilities were provided to prepare ground for their integration into the national mainstream of India. This had again raised the question how to preserve the cultural self-image of the tribal. Problem was, on the one hand, while the tribal cultural identify was to be maintained and on the other hand, it was a duty to widen their economic, political & socio-cultural frontier for integration into the national mainstream. But the time for achievement of the goal depended on the adaptability and response of the tribal to this new challenge and the congenial environmental factors arising out of well-thought-out national programmes executed judiciously and tactfully. Somehow, there had to be a balance. The balance had to emerge by a very hard in-depth look at both the growth-positive and growth-negative factors in tribal life and culture and selectively using them in the task of economic development and growth. In fact, the design for development of tribal communities had to incorporate such an approach and continuously question the parameters that were being applied in the formulation of the overall design, the micro-level strategies and operational goals. A lot was at stake and if in the process of development, we only succeed in making them carbon copies of our so-called developed societies, we would have destroyed something that was extremely valuable and was perhaps irreplaceable. The onus was on us to aid them to preserve and revive their culture which was decaying alarmingly. Wholehearted efforts should be made by adopting various measures to preserve and revive it, or else a great cultural tradition would be buried in the sandy-shores of time.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM AREA**

### ***Contemporary Social Relevance of the Conception / Scheme***

The need for the research experimental project was aroused out of certain historical and sociological necessities. The principal objective was to find answer to the following problems which were identified in the historical perspective and consequently realized with contemporary sensibility.

**Problem - 1: The indigenous tribal languages / dialects, art and culture faced the threat of extinction alarmingly amidst the torrential current of Globalization, Urbanization and Modernization**

Roughly, 5,100 languages were spoken around the globe and in India the number was 1682. Many indicators suggested that, within a generation or two, a lot many languages / dialects would be extinct. Languages were dying out every bit as quickly as biological species. While, in the latter case, plants and animals disappear from the history of nature never to be seen again but with the demise of languages, entire culture vanishes from the history of civilization, never to be lived again. For each tongue contains its own way of perceiving man and nature, expressing joy and sorrow and finding meaning in the flow of events. To pray or to love, to dream or to reason, evokes different vibration when done in different linguistic spirit. Just as certain plants and animals are responsible for the maintenance of large ecosystem. So, languages often carry subtle cultures through time. One species disappears, ecosystem stumbles; once languages die out, cultures falter. Along with languages, entire conception of what it means to be human had started evaporating during the development decades since 1950. And yet, the extinction of languages was the most alarming signal of the worldwide evaporation of cultures. Whichever way one looks at it, the homogenization of the world was in full swing. A global monoculture spread like an oil slick over the entire planet. So, what to speak of the tribal languages / dialects and culture! Even Odia being the language of the State also faced the same problem of gradually sinking into oblivion. Language reflects culture ethos and value systems. This was why the decay of tribal languages and culture needed to be revived, preserved & promoted through “Developing Contemporary Tribal theatre (In dialects)”.

**Problem – 2: Conversion of religious faith of the tribes into Christianity led to corresponding changes in their culture ending the Rites of passage, Cyclical group**

**rites and ultimately ending the tribal song, music and dance performances connected with the ritual festivals**

This problem was a very delicate matter of concern. Conversion of religious faith of the tribal into Christianity led to corresponding changes in their culture. Those tribal who had been converted into Christianity were no more inclined to follow the previous rites of passage of their ancestors. They did not even wish to recall the past tradition as it was connected with a different stagnant, insular and regressive primitive religious belief. In that context, there was a full stop in the traditional rites of passage and cyclical group rites covering round the year activities. Their cultural life-style had been completely changed per se. They were rather drawn towards modernity in every aspect of their life-style and culture. Even some of them who had been completely acculturated hesitated to be branded as backward tribal. But the concern was about the death of rich heritage of tribal performing arts i.e. song, music and dance which were connected with their rites of passage and cyclical group rites or festivals. The end of their rites of passage and cyclical group rites ultimately bring an end of traditional performing arts. Consequently, for obvious reasons the rich heritage of these performing arts needed to be documented / preserved for the posterity through “Developing Contemporary Tribal theatre”.

**Problem – 3:** The National task was to revive, preserve and promote the indigenous tribal languages / dialects, art and culture that faced the threat of extinction alarmingly. So, this research & experimental project on the conception of “Developing Contemporary Tribal theatre (in dialects) in Odisha” was a humble initiative to fulfill the national task which was the need of the time.

**Problem - 4:** Why the very terminology “Tribal theatre / drama / play” sounded a misnomer?

Tribal song, dance, music, painting and handicrafts etc. were well known and we were also familiar with those terminologies and forms of the items through various media. But the terminology like “Tribal theatre / drama / play”, in fact, sounded very much strange

and novel. To speak out more clearly, we knew, Songs of the Kondhs / Kondh-Song, Music of the Santals / Santali-Music, Dance of the Juangs / Juang-Dance, Paintings of the Saoras / Saora's-Paintings and so on. But the terminologies like "Theatre of the Kondhs / Kondh-Theatre", Drama of the Santals / Santali-Drama", and that of the other tribes seemed to us very much strange and new. One might be very much anxious to know the reason and the following questions aroused in mind:

- Why the very terminology "Tribal theatre / drama / play" sounded a misnomer?
- Whether there was at all any "Tribal theatre / drama / play"?
- Was there any proper Theatre tradition / Theatre trend in the tribal societies of Odisha or not?
- If at all tribal were doing theatre productions, why they had not been placed and counted in the mainstream theatre movement of the State being classified / identified as the "Tribal Theatre / Tribal Drama"?

All these questions needed to be answered properly. We did not find any authentic and correct answer regarding this. In fact, it was not easily elicited from any quarters. Though both intensive and extensive research works had already been carried out on different aspects of the tribes of Odisha, yet comparatively, scant work had been extended on the Performing Arts. Specifically, the aspect of "Tribal Theatre / drama / play" had not been explored so far though it was a very special dimension of the history / trend of theatre of Odisha. Even the Google search on "Tribal theatre/drama/play" showed only the Tribal dances. So, the study focused on these problems to find out the answer to the above-mentioned questions and articulate them in their proper perspective by introducing the term "Contemporary Tribal theatre".

#### **Problem - 5: Historically, tribal were deprived of scope and opportunities**

The dearth of trained-professionals among the tribal to venture with their own theatre movement and emerge as the vanguards of their culture-specific-milieu necessitated intensive training workshops. From the overall survey, it was a fact that there was none in



the State among the tribal who had studied dramatics from the State level institute like Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Bhubaneswar or the National Level Institute like National School of Drama, (NSD) New Delhi. Only one from Santal Tribe had joined the N.S.D. in the year 2001. He was Sukumar Tudu of Rairangpur. Hardly, a few had received just a cursory impartation in theatre orientation by joining training - workshops or participating in the productions done by amateur theatre groups of the State. Also, rarely did we see any tribal talent working in the State or with National level productions or being involved in the mainstream group theatre movement. Potential talents should be rendered scope to learn the elementary dramatics as well as modern techniques of theatre, besides the tricks of the trade. They needed to be embraced and encouraged to work and join in the mainstream theatre movement with their own perceived identity. Thus, production-oriented intensive theatre training workshops for the tribal participants were an integral part of this experimental research project on “Developing Contemporary Tribal theatre (in dialects) in Odisha. Because they were to kick-start and activate their own theatre movement and emerge as the vanguards of their culture-specific-milieu. We can work as catalyts only.

**Problem - 6: The difficulties with regard to development communication in the tribal zones through awareness plays and promotional films (produced in the languages other than their mother-tongues) could be avoided by converting the programmes into their mother-tongues for acceptable and motivationally transparent communication of themes / messages with the members of the communities**

Needless to reiterate, communication is a very important aspect in the process of social development. The role of various mass media had gained prime importance in the public information system for exposing people to various scientific knowledge and modern avenues as well as broadening their mental horizon. Street theatre as a very direct and powerful means of mass-communication had been sponsored and funded by the voluntary sector as well as the Government for its use in the peoples’ development awareness campaign programmes in Odisha and thus rendering its services to the society from the

last decade of the 20th Century. While performing awareness plays in Odia language in the tribal zones, the necessity was felt to form theatre groups organizing potential artists from the tribal communities and train them to perform plays in their own languages / dialects for transparent communication of themes with their community members. Because mother-tongue has its natural vibration and it is the best means of communicating un-obstructively and transparently with the members of the community. The Government and NGOs produced and used Documentaries, Short Films, and Animation Films etc. for Development awareness campaign in the tribal zones. As they were made in the languages other than their mother-tongues, it created hindrance for direct and transparent communication of messages. If those programmes could be dubbed into their mother-tongues, the communication gap would be bridged to a great extent. But, for that purpose, we needed trained tribal artists. Theatre is the base medium: the platform for grooming of all kinds of artists. If someone is trained in theatre, it would be comparatively convenient for him to work in film productions also. So, production-oriented theatre training workshop was an integral part of this research project on “Developing Contemporary Tribal theatre (in dialects) in Odisha”.

### **BROAD OBJECTIVE/VISION OF THE CONCEPTION/SCHEME**

Although the scholars and social scientists in the concerned field were advocating for preservation and promotion of tribal culture and accordingly some steps had been taken in this regard, but very little had been done so far to prepare a definite action plan to achieve this objective. In this venture, the researcher had made a humble attempt to discuss different aspects of tribal culture which needed thorough understanding for its preservation and promotion. He had discussed tribal society and culture, tribal language / dialect, art and craft, traditional communication skill and other aspects of their aesthetic life analytically and had come up with a working plan for development and preservation of the rich cultural heritage of the tribes. Since it was an application-oriented research project, the researcher had categorically advocated for developing Contemporary Tribal dramas / plays / theatre reflecting or incorporating various aspects of their culture, such as customs, traditions, dance & songs, music, art and craft, folklore, riddles, legends,

myths etc. by streamlining the potential tribal artists / artistes to join in the mainstream with their own identity and dignity. The initiative was not undertaken in a spirit of overlordship. This happened to be a humble yet catalytic endeavor on the part of the researcher to stir and to spur the tribal psyche to configure a syntax that might be nomenclature as” Contemporary Tribal theatre”. With regard to the issue of the contemporaneity, it was best left to their sensibilities in the course of time to come up with it.

The latent intension behind this project was to nullify the ever-accelerating stereo-type perception of the mainstream as well as the contemporary tribal vis-a-vis to his individual items of performing / plastic arts and recreate and revive them through an engrossingly captivating medium of theatre in an innocuous way. Such dramas / plays were to be organized in their localities as well as in different non-tribal areas / urban centers to familiarize the general public with tribal society and culture as well as to give the huge, suppressed reality of their existence, visibility and recognition in the public sphere. This would also help in preserving and promoting the tribal culture to a large extent. This type of “Community theatre” or “Theatre of the roots” will not only be a matter of representing their ethno-cultural identity but also be a glorious addition to the theatre history / trend of Odisha as well as to the Pan-Indian contemporary theatre movement of the Nation. It was a Human Resource Development project with a broad vision for the socio-cultural movement of the tribal: to let the tribal cultural identity stand in the mainstream as in the case of other cultural groups of India, on the principle of diversity in unity, the basic theme of Indian National life. Though the project had been conceived in the context of the tribes of Odisha, yet, the vision had far reaching implications for the aboriginal tribal communities of the Nation and the World in general.

#### **DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY & THE DESIGN OF THE PILOT PROJECT**

The concept remains hypothetical, if it is not executed as a project or translated into action. The entire exercise stagnates as meaningless and futile. As such, theatre is a very practical medium - you do it and prove it. So, the pilot project was designed keeping in

view the objectives and the emergent achievement of the vision of the Conception / Scheme. For a start, the design of the pilot project showed the method of developing Contemporary Tribal theatre in Orissa. The Design of the pilot project for developing a Contemporary Tribal theatre: Organizing and conducting production-oriented Tribal theatre training workshop at the State level in Bhubaneswar involving selective potential talents preferably budding talents / youths from a tribe (who are academically educated future citizens) for spreading awareness on the uniqueness and splendor of their indigenous languages / dialects, art and culture and preserving, promoting those by reflecting / incorporating the same in the making of a Contemporary Tribal play. Besides, it was a Human Resource Development project for broadening their outlook, developing their communication skill and personality with contemporary sensibility, yet with the vision for the emerging vanguards of their culture-specific-milieu. It was not possible, due to innumerable constraints, to undertake and organize number of projects at a time involving selective potential talents of the different tribal communities in different localities. So, the pilot project was organized at the State level involving selective potential talents of a solitary tribe (Santal) only for checking the feasibility, to find the purity of the outcome as well as highlight the content.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT PROJECT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

The experimental pilot project / the First State level Tribal theatre Training Workshop Production involving 20 budding talents (High School students) from the “Santal” Community of Mayurbhanj district was organized at Bhubaneswar from 12<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2002 by INTERFACE in association with the ATDC, ST & SC Development Department, Government of Orissa and the project was supported by UNICEF, Bhubaneswar. The participants performed a play in their “Santali Language” titled “Chalak Tuyu” (Clever Jackal) which was based and developed on a folktale of the Santals’. It was performed in a grand manner at Adivasi ground, Bhubaneswar on 28<sup>th</sup> January during the Annual State Level Tribal Fair organized by the ST & SC Development Department, Government of Orissa. The success of the pilot project has remained as a landmark in the theatre history of Odisha.

## **THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY TRIBAL THEATRE**

The outcome of the pilot project has proven the success of the conception / scheme. The conception views a kind of theatre which looks indigenously tribal but having contemporary flavor / a kind of contemporary theatre with indigenous tribal flavor. If all the elements of a theatre production i.e. story, language, song, dance, music, costume, property etc. are indigenously tribal in nature and the play is performed with modern sensibility by the tribal artists, what is the impediment in categorizing it as the “Contemporary Tribal theatre / drama / play”? Tribal idioms, in this theatre, are used to both entertain and educate. This is a community-based theatre / Theatre of a tribal community reflecting their ethno-cultural identity. The tribal dance, music, song etc. are categorized as “Dance of the Santal” or “Santali-dance”, “Music of the Kondh” or “Kondh-music”, “Song of the Paraja” or “Paraja-song” and so on. In the same principle, Tribal theatre / drama / play can be categorized as Drama of the Santal or Santali-drama, Play of the Oraon or Oraon-play and so on. As such generally Drama/Theatre is recognized according to the language, culture & region base. For example, Oriya play, Bengali drama, Manipuri theatre & so on. Hence this researcher feels it justified to introduce the very terminology Tribal theatre / drama / play to solve the purpose. Also, there is no harm in saying and categorizing as Santali drama, Kui play, Paroja theatre & so on.

## **THE CREATIVE ASPECT OF THE CONCEPTION / SCHEME**

The creative aspect of experimentation of this conception has been greatly inspired by the trend of pan-Indian concept of “Modern Indian Drama” discursively practiced and represented by the avant-garde theatre directors of the nation like B.V. Karanth, K.N. Panikkar, Habib Tanvir, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Rattan Thiyam, Kanhailal and others since the 1960s. Their theatre philosophies of “Return to Traditionalism”/ “Theatre of the roots” / “Theatre in the spirit of decolonization” / “Inter-culturalism in theatre” etc.

are the prime sources of inspiration for the researcher. The concept of 'Developing Contemporary Tribal theatre in Orissa' is an extension of that national trend as well as a departure at certain required points. However, it is an addition, not a complete break of that national trend of creative experimentation. Besides, this concept has been inspired by the Scheme of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. It was launched from 1984 to 1993 for the production of new exciting and innovative works which promised to enhance the frontiers of theatre, both in terms of production values and thematic content. Admittedly, this present Concept is an adaptation of that Scheme for the tribal zones of Orissa: the creative experimental process is applied here to conceptualize and develop the Contemporary Tribal theatre in Orissa. All the elements required for theatre production are present abundantly in the tribal societies of Orissa. They are to be identified, organized, classified and the delicate synthesis arising out of their own milieu can be creatively combined in an innocuous way with prevalent modern theatre-techniques in order to develop plays in the local dialects as well as theatre-idioms indigenously tribal in character and thereby developing contemporary theatre style of the communities. This theatre is to be emerged from the cultural resources of their world. It is the theatre of the roots / theatre of the communities with their local colours and aesthetic flavours reflecting their psyche. The play and its style of presentation - everything to be emerged out smoothly being based and developed on their potentialities, vitalities as well as with the collective participation of the group. The researcher-director in this context, is a mere catalyst only.

The focus will be on their indigenous dialects, songs, music, dance, folklore, riddle and folk-theatre forms so as to rediscover and improve upon their vitalities, dynamisms and existing theatre modes. The traditional / indigenous elements are to be integrated with modern theatre techniques innovatively to speak out to the modern audience in contemporary terms / idioms while the root of the commitment percolates down to the virgin-rich firmament of their folk culture. The aim is to preserve, promote and disseminate tribal language, art and cultural heritage without distortion by reflecting those in the making of the modern tribal plays. The creative process involves the reproduction of the reality and in some required cases it may go for fusion / cross-

fertilization of tribal folk elements with modern aspects of the theatrical production. However, in the entire process, much care has to be taken to highlight their indigenous cultural identity so that the community can relate to that theatre as their very own and the trend inspiringly will spread.

## **FURTHER EXPERIMENTS BEYOND THE PILOT PROJECT**

The following are the further experiments beyond the pilot project by the present researcher which proved the sustainability of the conception / scheme:

- (i) Pioneer venture in theatre was undertaken in the State level by the Directorate of Health services, Government of Nagaland which organized a production-oriented Street theatre training workshop at Kohima in 2002 for campaign on AIDS awareness in the State. It was facilitated by Loyola Centre for Communication and Culture, Bhubaneswar, Orissa. This researcher (Director of Interface) was assigned to conduct the training-workshop-production. It was an opportunity to experiment on the conception. The 45 numbers of tribal youth participants were trained up to perform the play, “AIDS Ko Hosorkoribi” (Beware of AIDS) in their “Nangamese” language of the “Ao” tribe.
- (ii) The second State level Tribal theatre Workshop-Production involving 20 budding talents (students of Tapovan High School, Bhubaneswar, ST & SC Development Department, Government of Orissa) was organized by INTERFACE at Bhubaneswar in 2004. The participants performed “Dhala Bilua” (White Jackal) in amalgamated tribal dialects-inflected-Oriya at Adivasi ground, Bhubaneswar during the Annual State Level Tribal Fair.
- (iii) Production oriented Street theatre training workshop was organized in 2005 by the NGO “Sampari Hukumo Bodol”, Don Bosco Centre at Agartala, Tripura in association with the North Eastern Regional Youth Commission, Guwahati. It was facilitated by Loyola Centre for Communication and Culture, Bhubaneswar, Orissa. This Researcher was assigned to conduct the training workshop production. It was also an opportunity to experiment on the conception. The 23

numbers of tribal youth participants were trained up to perform the play in “Kokborok” language of the “Debabarma” tribe entitled “Tongchang Ni Khumulang” (Garden of peace) for campaign on the concert of peace / national integration. The play has been performed in more than 100 shows in different corners of Tripura.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Tribals are born artists. All the elements required for theatre production are present abundantly in the tribal society of Orissa. Late Pundit Raghunath Murmu of the Santal community has written and performed plays since 1944. He has written Bidu Chandan, Kherwal Bir, DaregeDhan, Siddhu Kahnu Santal Hul etc. Now the Santals have developed their professional Opera Parties / Jatra Parties in a modern way. “Desia Nata”, which is very popular among the tribals of the Southern Odisha, is now-a-days performed in a grand manner just like modern Jatras of Odisha. Parab Festival is organized every year by the District Council of Culture, Koraput, since 1996. Tribal groups participate and perform plays in this festival along with their folk dances. Sources reveal, tribal groups also have performed their plays in the festivals like the Loka Nataka Mahotsav, organized at Rourkela, National Theatre Olympiad organized by Utkal Yuba Sanskrutik Sangha at Cuttack, All India Multi-Lingual Children’s play festival, organized by the Theatre Movement at Cuttack, National Multi-Lingual theatre festival, organized by Saatabdira Kalakar at Bhubaneswar and in the theatre festivals organized at Patna, Jalandhar, Chhattisgarh, Allahabad, which are considered as National level events. However, theatre / drama is not a new phenomenon in the tribal societies of Odisha. It may be occasional happenings, but they are acquainted with the open air Jatras, proscenium plays and street theatre performances. It may be a new event for some of the tribal who lead an insular existence and live in extreme remote corners. Otherwise, mobile shows of opera parties, circulation of audio cassettes / CDs and circulation of video cassettes / CD films have opened up their ability to adapt. So, they are very much acquainted with the medium and influenced by the styles. The plays performed by various tribal groups at different pockets have hardly got any scope to come to limelight



as because they are beyond the pale of media glare and presumptuously negligible to be newsworthy. They are yet to be placed in the mainstream with their own identities intact and their output classified as Tribal theatre / drama / play. Besides, we have seen tribal dance festivals, but a festival of Tribal plays is yet to be organized at the state level as well as at the National level.

The terms like Tribal drama / play / theatre are not in circulation with us as because those have not been brought to the fore through various media. Besides, they have never been introduced academically. It is difficult to procure authentic documents on the history / trend of theatre prevalent in the tribal societies of Orissa. We do not find a specific page on it in the publications that carry 'the history / trend of theatre of Orissa': the theatre history of Orissa has not included any chapter captioned as "The Tribal drama / play / theatre of Orissa". There are many books containing the phases of development of Oriya plays / theatre, but it is difficult to find a book that contains 'the phases of developments of plays / drama / theatre of the tribal societies of Orissa'. We do not find any chapter / book / compilation of documents etc. on the Tribal drama / theatre style of Orissa as we find with regard to the contemporary Oriya plays and the status of contemporary theatre in Orissa. Probably, none has given a thought to it and no conscious academic research in depth has been carried out so far in this regard though it is a very special dimension of the theatre history / trend of Orissa. It is high time, that this neglected chapter should be treated very carefully for its inclusion in the theatre history of Orissa with the sincerest of intentions. Thus, careful study, research, documentation and dissemination projects on the Tribal folk theatre forms as well as modern Tribal drama / theatre are the need of the hour - a vast field to be explored indeed. Contrary to certain perceptions, the State of Orissa is not narrowly confined to either to the geographical or cultural gamut of the eastern coastal regions only. The integrated Orissa encompasses the western tribal areas also. Therefore, the theatre of Orissa should not narrowly mean the plays of Oriya language only. There are many other plays in many languages / dialects of Orissa. Should they all not be included at the State level in an integrated manner when we speak of the 'Theatre of Odisha'? Applicable in this instance are the 'Folk theatre forms of Odisha'.

The task lies ahead not only to be fulfilled by individual scholars, researchers but also by the institutions and departments both private as well as Government.

## CONCLUSION

The principal intention behind this impetus for evolvment and subsequent development of Contemporary Tribal theatre in Odisha is to galvanize and stimulate the hitherto impressionable tribals into seeking a definitive style that suitably projects their unique psyche and ethos thus enriching their own as well as national theatre tradition. It would certainly enable them to dig deeper and find more about their primitive past and the sustainable way of life that they led uninterrupted until only a couple of decades earlier. Unadulterated by the extraneous established influences, the indigenous tribal still has a definite possibility to articulate his world-view in his own aboriginal perspective. The pertinent aspect that strives to be driven home to all and sundry is to eliminate the misconception that the deliverance of these people can only come about from the dominant, quasi-colonial mindset. One is never apprehensive about the potential of the noble savage to show the world a viably different approach to life that can be more meaningful, less discordant and yet be diverse. It will not be presumptuous to assume that the so-called savage mind carries with it the wisdom of the ages in sustainable living. Is not it enough reason to encourage him to pleasantly rediscover himself and allowing us, in the process, to part-take in the fruits of his quest? True, theatre in Orissa has fallen on bad days. At this dismal juncture, when established theatre outfits are struggling hard to keep the flame of contemporary theatre burning and are battling problems, this initiative / venture is no doubt a bold step. The sustenance of “Contemporary Tribal theatre Movement” is a big task indeed. However, this initiative / venture is at best an appeal and an indicator for the powers-to-be to contemplate with regard to its indispensability and carry forth from this departure in the true spirit of encompassing our long-lost brethren within our broader hearth. Hopefully, this research project will be a valuable contribution and will remain as the beacon for the future.

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